

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Brucellosis

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What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a disease that is caused by *Brucella* bacteria (germ). Brucellosis mainly affects sheep, goats, cattle, deer, elk, pigs, dogs and several other animals. People who have contact with infected animals may become infected with *Brucella* bacteria. Brucellosis is commonly found in countries outside of the United States. It is very rare in Massachusetts.

How is brucellosis spread?

People can become infected with *Brucella* through a break in the skin that is in contact with animals that are contaminated with the bacteria. *Brucella* is also spread by eating or drinking unpasteurized milk, cheese and ice cream that came from infected animals. Brucellosis is not easily transmitted from person to person.

Can *Brucella* be used for bioterrorism?

Yes. Bioterrorism is the use of any biological organism to hurt people or create fear. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists *Brucella* as a possible bioterrorist agent; however, it has never been successfully used in this manner.

What are the symptoms of brucellosis?

Brucellosis has a wide range of symptoms. Some of these are similar to the flu including fever, chills, sweats, headaches, muscle aches, joint pains, back pain, and physical weakness. Brucellosis can also lead to long lasting symptoms that include recurrent fevers, joint pain, and fatigue.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of brucellosis can appear anywhere from 5 to 60 days after exposure to the bacteria but most people start to show symptoms about 3 to 4 weeks after exposure.

How is brucellosis diagnosed?

The diagnosis of brucellosis is made by finding the germ through laboratory testing of blood, bone marrow and other tissues.

How is brucellosis treated?

Brucellosis is treated by taking antibiotics for up to 6 weeks to prevent re-occurring infection. Recovery may take a few weeks to several months. Death rarely occurs.

Is there a vaccine for brucellosis?

There is no vaccine against brucellosis currently available for humans; however, there is a vaccine available for animals.

How can I prevent brucellosis?

Do not eat or drink unpasteurized milk, cheese or ice cream. If you are not sure whether the dairy product is pasteurized, do not eat it. Hunters and farmers should use rubber gloves when handling dead animals.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>
- Your local board of health (listed in the telephone directory under “government”)
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850, or on the MDPH website at <http://www.mass.gov/dph>

November 2002